

# San Mateo County Times

## Explosives bunker heist could lead to creation of new law

Lantos-sponsored bill requires tighter control of storage sites

By Amy Yarbrough  
STAFF WRITER

**Wednesday, September 29, 2004** - Congressman Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, is co-sponsoring a bill that would impose tight restrictions on public explosives-storage facilities – the direct result of a break-in at a San Mateo County munitions bunker this summer.

Introduced Tuesday, the "Law Enforcement Explosives Storage Act" allows the Attorney General to inspect facilities where state authorities store explosives and requires the state to keep lists of all their locations. Agencies not in compliance would lose federal grant money.

Lantos, who co-sponsored the bill with Congressman Chris Shays, R-Conn., said the legislation was necessary to help close a "gaping hole in homeland security."

Under current law, the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has the power to regulate and inspect private facilities, but can only set guidelines for how public agencies store their explosives.

As a result, authorities say, they can't even tell just how many such sites exist in the U.S.

"Public agencies don't have a comprehensive list – or evidently, any list – of where dangerous explosives are held ...," Lantos said. "As we speak we have hundreds, possibly thousands of sites all across the U.S."

The bill comes some three months after the theft of 200 pounds of high explosives from a law enforcement storage bunker near Crystal Springs Reservoir.

The bunker – used by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, San Francisco Police Department and the FBI to store explosives seized in criminal investigations and those used for training purposes – had no video camera and an alarm system that hadn't been working for years.

The bill would require the Attorney General to set new security standards that would, at a minimum, force facilities to have video surveillance or an alarm system capable of notifying authorities of a break-in. Agencies would be able to apply for a matching grant to help pay for the cost of increased security.

Within six months of the bill's passage, ATF would have to provide the Attorney General's Office with a list of all the storage facilities where public agencies keep explosives.

Any agencies found not in compliance as a result of inspections by the Attorney General would lose 10 percent of any grant awarded to them from the Department of Justice.

Staff writer Amy Yarbrough covers police and public safety. She can be reached at (650) 348-4339 or by e-mail at [ayarbrough@sanmateocountytimes.com](mailto:ayarbrough@sanmateocountytimes.com).